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Original Article

### Unlocking the Puzzle: Exploring the Declining Interest in Economics among Faculty and Students at East Africa University's Garowe Campus

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#### Keywords:

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Department of Economics,  
Faculty,  
Social Science.

The purpose of this study is to examine the students' perceptions of economics, identify the factors responsible for the diminished interest in economics, and determine how to create effective solutions for these problems. East Africa University's (EAU) Garowe campus, which is among the oldest in the state, has been considered the subject of this study. The study adopted basic random sampling to determine the sample size for the survey. The data in this research was collected through online surveys and interviews. The survey was given to the university students. The survey consisted of multiple-choice questions and Likert-scale responses. Participants were given enough time to fill out the survey anonymously, and 28 people responded. When the survey was fully completed, the data was then analysed using Microsoft Excel. The results of the research conducted showed that: (1) there is a lack of public awareness about the importance of this field and the career opportunities associated with it, as proven by 97% of the respondents who chose (agree and strongly agree). (2) The belief that economics is tough because of math causes some students to choose not to major in this field. This belief influences the majority of students' decisions not to pursue degrees in this field, as demonstrated by the 54% of respondents who selected (agree and strongly agree). This is a true belief that could prevent students from learning economics. (3) Economics is not a hard field of study, as proven by 64% of students who chose "no" to the statement of whether economics is a hard field of study, confirming that economics is not a difficult subject. (4) Business and economics was an interesting subject in high school, as proven by 75% of the respondents who chose (agree and strongly agree).

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## INTRODUCTION

This study aims to investigate the student's perceptions of economics and why economic faculty is less interested among the students. It was hard for me to start learning economics since the majority of the universities in Garowe were not providing this course. Fortunately, I found that faculty at East Africa University's (EAU), and I enrolled. Since we were less than ten students in the class, there was a risk that we would be divided into other faculties. Each year, hundreds of students come to the university to study, and each of them has a dream to fulfil. These students study other department like business administration, accounting, health, law, or IT, but the least enrol in economics compared to other faculties.

I always questioned myself: Why on earth don't these students enrol in economics? What is the matter with economics? Is there a lack of understanding about the opportunities in studying economics, and if so, how do we solve it? I tried to find answers to these questions, but I failed to find any. So, I read about the importance of conducting research, and I realized that the purpose of research is to find answers to mysterious questions such as those above and understand the issue deeply. That was my first reason to start doing this research.

Adam Smith's works, particularly his *Wealth of Nations* (1776), laid the groundwork for modern economics. (Adam Smith - *Economics, Wealth, Capitalism* / *Britannica*, n.d.) As a result, it is one of the courses offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences on the EAU Garowe campus. Its position, however, has been shaken in recent years by the alarming decrease in the number of students enrolled in this department. This has sparked a surge of interest among students at the EAU Garowe campus in

investigating the cause of the situation and why it is occurring. One suggestion that is frequently raised within these discussions is that the lack of public awareness about the importance of this field of study and the career opportunities that are associated with it has led to a significant decrease in the enrolment of this department.

Instructors have the ability to enhance the relevance and appeal of their subject matter to students through the incorporation of real-world applications and collaboration with industry within the curriculum. Moreover, they can cater to the specific needs and issues of learners in their region and country, thereby establishing a stronger connection between the content and the students. Additionally, teachers can utilize experiments, narratives, and interactive teaching methodologies to captivate students and render the learning process more enjoyable. It is essential to establish a classroom atmosphere that fosters intellectual engagement, where students feel supported, respected, and confident in their capacity to learn. Instructors can accomplish this by presenting students with appropriate challenges, providing academic assistance, and expressing enthusiasm for the subject matter.

Research conducted by (Al-Sheeb et al., 2018) showed that the first-year seminar significantly increased positive attitudes toward the college. When higher education institutions assist new students with the challenges they are facing, first-year seminars could substantially reduce students' fears and uncertainties, leading to a happier college experience. When students feel satisfied, they are more likely to persist and excel in their academics. Such initiatives have the potential to enhance students' understanding and awareness. Establishing a dedicated platform for first-year students to

elaborate on and make them understand economics and its associated career prospects can effectively address the prevailing lack of awareness in this domain.

Transition programs at universities encompass a variety of initiatives aimed at supporting students during their transition into and progression through their academic journey. These programs typically consist of orientation sessions, which aim to familiarize students with campus resources. Academic advising is also provided to assist students in planning their course schedules and academic objectives. Workshops or seminars focusing on study skills, time management, and other fundamental skills for success in higher education are often included. Moreover, universities may offer peer mentoring programs where experienced students provide guidance and support to newcomers, aiding in their adjustment to university life and academic expectations. Ultimately, the university's transition program aims to facilitate a seamless transition for students from diverse educational backgrounds into the university environment, ensuring they receive the necessary support to excel academically and personally. This program has the potential to eliminate negative perceptions of economics. Research conducted by (Marangos, 2006) assessed the effectiveness of the introduction of an Economics Orientation Tutorial in the Transition Program as a means of dealing with general transition issues and altering the negative perception of Economics.

Another suggestion posits that economics is perceived as a challenging discipline due to its mathematical nature. It is commonly believed that economics revolves solely around statistics and mathematics, leading some students to opt out of pursuing an economics major. However, it is important to note that while economics does incorporate both maths and statistics, these subjects are not excessively intricate for undergraduate students. Typically, economics majors are required to take one introductory calculus course and one statistics course. Surprisingly, the amount of mathematics involved in economics often pleases even those students who proclaim, "Math isn't my forte." At the undergraduate level, economics courses are actually not heavily focused on

mathematics in many colleges and universities. Instead, they predominantly employ a significant number of diagrams rather than complex mathematical calculations.

Cognitive skills in learning economics should be provided to weak students in mathematical calculations and English writing. Strategies for making the classes more enjoyable and interesting through some innovative teaching or learning styles should be adopted. Certain extra-curricular activities or educational visits should be conducted to make economics more enjoyable to non-business students (Ahmad Zaini et al., 2008)

The analysis of students' perception of economic teaching also shows results as expected. An index combining the elements satisfaction with quality, comprehension, appropriateness of requirements as well as expected learning success due to and general interest in teaching style has a positive impact on the prospect of more economic studies, while the opposite is found to be true for the negative perception of economics being evaluated as too theoretical (Sidki & Boll, 2017)

However, if we solely focus on this specific arithmetic and neglect providing students with opportunities to engage with intricate mathematical concepts, there is a significant probability that they will not achieve substantial progress. Unfortunately, we have observed numerous instances in which students develop a pessimistic attitude towards mathematics and their own abilities, leading them to completely abandon the subject, and in some cases, even drop out of school. In order to tackle this issue, it is imperative to instruct and ensure a thorough comprehension of the fundamental principles of calculus and algebra. This will aid in preempting future problems, including the one that my paper aims to address. I firmly believe that this is one of the primary factors contributing to the aforementioned problem.

Another suggestion has been that some students claim that economics wasn't interesting in high school, **so it's not going to be very interesting in college.** Consumer economics is usually the focus of a high school economics course, and it takes up a lot of discussion time. Pupils gain knowledge of budgets, supply and demand, and other fundamental

concepts. These are essential topics because understanding the fundamentals of these subjects can aid in a deeper understanding of the subject. Despite this, a lot of students believe that economics is only concerned with consumer issues after taking a high school economics course. Still, there are typically significant differences between an economics course in high school and one in college.

The study of Economics enables a student to understand the nature of the complexity of the economic activities of which he is only a very small part; It enables students to understand and appreciate various government policies where choices have to be made such as probably to spend more money on free education and therefore provide fewer employment opportunities; the study of Economics provides the students with basic skills for analysing Economic problems thereby preparing them better for positions where economic decisions have to be made; the study of Economics helps a government to promote growth and development, therefore, improving the quality of life of the citizens; knowledge of Economics is useful to analyse fascinating patterns of socio-economic behaviour; the study of Economics is useful to understand and alter the inequalities in the distribution of income and opportunities (Adu, 2012) as cited in (Filade et al., 2020).

The significance of the student-led learning approach is that students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning. The student-learning model puts more emphasis on a student as a central component of the teaching-learning process in school. The instructor creates platforms and avenues for students to learn independently and from one another and offers supportive supervision to students as they learn. The efficiency of this teaching and learning procedure largely rests on the choice of the teacher's teaching method (Bwari Christine et al., 2019).

Teacher-centred approaches include lecture methods, drilling, and questioning. In teacher-centred approach, learning takes place when teachers teach and later examine taught concepts by giving students exercises related to the teacher's presentation during or after the lesson. This is for the purpose of finding out whether students grasped the

knowledge passed on to them by the teacher. It is considered sensible for teachers to be familiar with the language which the students are using to learn. (Bwari Christine et al., 2019).

### **Problem Statement**

The primary issue under investigation by the researcher pertains to the factors contributing to the decline in enrolment within the Department of Economics. This predicament has emerged as one of the department's most formidable challenges over the course of the previous six years. Despite concerted efforts by successive deans to address this quandary, no discernible progress has been achieved thus so far.

A solid comprehension of economics is widely regarded as crucial for achieving success in areas such as banking, finance, and business management. Economists find employment in various sectors, including private enterprises, utilities, railroads, governments at all tiers, educational institutions, labour unions, trade associations, and non-profit organizations. Having a comprehensive understanding of these factors provides valuable insight into the significance of economics and the corresponding career prospects. However, what motivates a student to forgo this pivotal discipline and pursue studies in another department at EAU? The Department of Economics has a total of 40 students, compared to 164 students in the Faculty of Social Science and Economics. This indicates that the Department of Economics represents only 24.39% of the total student population.

The relatively small size of the student body raises concerns about the department's need for growth and improvement. The department offers four semesters: semester 8, semester 6, semester 5, and semester 2. Each semester consists of only one class. The semester 6 class has nine students, while the semester 5 class has ten students. The remaining classes are similarly small. It is not justifiable for a department like economics, which deserves to be classified as a faculty, to exhibit such minimal figures. The researcher's objective is to identify the underlying causes of the poor enrolment rates and communicate them to the university administration for the purpose of implementing effective measures to resolve this issue.



## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify practical solutions and insights into the factors underlying the waning interest in the economics department among students enrolled at the EAU Garowe campus. The study seeks to examine the students' perceptions of the economics major and explore the determinants impacting their decision to pursue alternative fields of study instead of economics.

## Research Questions

- What are the factors that contribute to students' decision not to pursue a major in economics at East Africa University (EAU)?
- What are the factors that influence students' negative attitudes towards the economics department?

## Significance of the Research

This paper is of great importance as it aims to shed light on the factors that have led to the decrease in enrolment in the Department of Economics, in comparison to other departments in the Faculty of Social Science and Economics. The main objective is to ascertain if there is a lack of awareness among the students regarding the importance and relevance of this field. Furthermore, the paper examines the perspectives of students from other departments towards economics. The findings of this study have the potential to provide valuable insights for the general public, academics, students, and university administrators.

## Methodology

### Sample size and population

This study was conducted on the department of economics students at East Africa University (EAU), Garowe Campus in 2024 through random sampling method. The researcher utilized simple

random sampling to determine the sample size for the survey. In this type of sampling, the members of the sample are selected randomly and purely by chance. Hence, the quality of the sample is not affected as every member has an equal chance of being selected in the sample. This type of sampling is best for a population that is highly homogenous (Bhardwaj, 2019). Simple random sampling is an extensively used sampling method in scientific research (Tajik & Golzar, 2022).

## Sources and Data Collection Techniques

The source of the data in this study is primary data obtained through a questionnaire. Data collection utilized questionnaire in which each item in the instrument was tested for validity and reliability. The questionnaire was administered through Microsoft Forms and distributed to a Telegram group. This group consisted of 195 members from various departments of the Faculty of Social Science and Economics, including the Department of Economics, Department of Social Work, Department of Public Administration, and the Department of Security Studies. Out of the total responses posted on the group's wall, 28 students provided answers to the uploaded questionnaire by the author.

The questionnaire consisted of four questions, some of which had four response choices: Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, and Neither Agree nor Disagree. Other questions contained three response choices: Yes, No, and Maybe. All questions in the questionnaire were based on the Likert scale. Sufficient time was given to the students to complete the survey, and a total of 28 individuals responded. The survey was completed in its entirety, and the results were subsequently analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The survey obtained a variety of responses from students regarding their perception of economics.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1: There is a lack of public awareness about the importance of this field of study and the career opportunities associated with it.**

Category	Responses	Percentage
Agree	10	36%
Strongly agree	17	61%
Disagree	1	4%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Total	28	100%

**Source:** field data

The first inquiry attempted to determine whether the students were unaware of the significance of this field of study and the associated career opportunities. The respondents could select from the following four options: strongly disagree, disagree, strongly agree, and agree. Strongly agree was selected by 61% of respondents, followed by agree (36%), disagree (4%), and strongly disagree (0%). Students confirmed the statement that there is a lack of public awareness about the significance of this field and the career opportunities associated with it, as proven by the 97% of respondents who chose (agree and strongly agree). There was not a single respondent who opted to strongly disagree, demonstrating to us that the students were not aware of the significance of this field of study and the associated career opportunities.

The perception of students towards economics is a significant factor contributing to its negative image. In order to address this issue, it is essential for teachers to fulfill their role in an effective manner. Teachers possess the capability to transform this unfavorable perception into a positive one. They can

assist students in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, fostering a genuine interest in economics, and potentially encouraging further study in this field. The teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, coupled with their effective teaching techniques, can greatly influence the perception of economics. For instance, a teacher's influence can shape a student's affinity towards a particular subject, just as it can lead to a student developing a dislike for another subject.

A study conducted by Webber & Mearman, (2012) revealed that the demand for economics is influenced by various perceptions of the subject. Additionally, the researchers proposed two potential strategies for individuals seeking to address this issue. One: the content and character of the subject remain intact, whilst instructors try to convince current students that the subject is useful, helpful to their future career and will help them with their decision making; or two: the content is changed so that student wanting these characteristics can more easily identify that this is the case. Teachers can be the key to deal with bad preception.

**Table 2: The belief that economics is tough because of math causes some students to choose not to major in this field of study.**

Category	Responses	Percentage
Agree	10	36%
Strongly agree	5	18%
Disagree	8	29%
Strongly disagree	2	7%
Neutral	3	11%
Total	28	100%

**Source:** field data

Determining whether or not student agree with this was the aim of the third statement. Examining whether some students decide against majoring in economics due to math difficulty was the main goal of the statement. The responders could select any one of the following five options: neutral, strongly disagree, disagree, strongly agree, and agree. The

respondents' choices were as follows: 36% agreed, 29% disagreed, 18% strongly agreed, 7% strongly disagreed, and 11% neutral. 54% of respondents who selected 'agree and strongly agree' believe that this belief is real and is the primary reason why most students choose not to major in this field of study. This belief can potentially hinder economic

education. Many students opt out of pursuing a degree in economics because they perceive it as solely focused on math and statistics. However, while economics does involve some math, it also relies heavily on diagrams.

The notion that mathematics makes economics a challenging discipline may lead certain students to opt for alternative fields instead of pursuing economics. This perception is one of several commonly held beliefs among students regarding economics, and it often stems from a fear or anxiety towards mathematics. Math anxiety is often

developed as a result of a student's prior negative experience when learning math in the classroom or at home. Teachers and parents often exacerbate a child's level of anxiety by imposing their personal views about math. Each negative experience is transferred into the thoughts of any future math work and ultimately causes a lack of understanding of mathematics (Rossnan, 2006). Math anxiety has been defined as feelings of tension and anxiety that interfere with the manipulation of numbers and the solving of mathematical problems in a wide variety of ordinary life and academic situations. (Yenilmez et al., 2007).

**Table 3: Business and economics were interesting subjects in high school**

Category	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	10	39%
Agree	11	36%
Strongly disagree	3	11%
Disagree	4	14%
Total	28	100%

**Source:** field data

The fourth statement sought to ascertain whether or not the students thought economics was a fascinating subject in high school. The respondents could select any one of the following four options: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The respondents' choices were as follows: 36% agreed, 39% strongly agreed, 14% disagreed, and 11% strongly disagreed. It is evident that 75% of respondents selected "agree and strongly agree," demonstrating that business and economics were an interesting subject in high school. In contrast, 25% of respondents selected "disagree and strongly disagree." Most high school economics courses cover topics like supply and demand, migration, inflation, budget, and other fundamental concepts.

However, there are usually some notable distinctions between a high school and a college economics course. To see how the topics covered in a college economics course differ from those you may have studied in your high school course, just open any textbook on economic principles. To further understand what I mean, keep reading texts used in other courses in economics. You will notice that different courses, such as agricultural economics, labour economics, monetary economics, environmental economics, health economics, education economics, international economics,

History of economic thoughts, and sports economics, are taken in universities.

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**Table 4: Is economics a hard field of study?**

Category	Responses	Percentage
Yes	5	18%
No	18	64%
Maybe	5	18%
Total	28	100%

**Source:** field data

The statement sought to ascertain whether students considered economics to be a challenging subject. The options that the respondents could choose from were maybe, no, and yes. 64% of respondents said "no," followed by "yes" (18%), and "maybe" (18%). 64% of students said (no), confirming that economics is not a difficult subject to study, 18% selected (maybe), indicating that they are unaware. A total of 18% of the participants provided an affirmative response, signifying their familiarity with the field of economics. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that this percentage may not necessarily represent an accurate reflection, as there exist various factors which can exert an influence on the perceived difficulty of a subject, such as the level of preparedness exhibited by the students and the instructional methods employed. In summary, an overwhelming majority of 64% of the respondents indicated that economics does not pose a challenge to their learning. This finding implies that students possess a certain level of comprehension regarding economics, potentially stemming from their previous exposure to the subject during their secondary education, particularly in the form of business and economics course.

### Limitations of the study

The main limitation of this study is the low response rate. Out of the 195 individuals we contacted, only 28 responded, which equates to approximately 14.36%. The low response rate can be attributed to the fact that we collected responses during the exam period, and many students were focused on their exams. This may have resulted in a decreased willingness to participate in the study. For future research, we recommend implementing strategies to increase response rates. These strategies may include enhancing survey design, employing alternative methods for survey distribution, offering incentives to participants, and sending follow-up reminders.

### CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study is to determine strategies that can enable the university, along with other stakeholders in society, to make well-informed decisions regarding this matter. Somalia is a country abundant in resources; however, the effective protection and administration of these resources require a knowledgeable workforce. With the longest coastline in Africa, Somalia possesses mineral resources, livestock, and arable land suitable for farming and agriculture. Nevertheless, the country faces a range of challenges including inflation, unemployment, poverty, droughts, and a weak currency. To address these issues and capitalize on the available resources, it is crucial to have economists who possess the expertise to find effective solutions.

The demand for an economics department in universities is closely linked to student enrolment. The limited demand for economics is evidenced by the low number of students opting for this field of study. This lack of interest can hinder the development of individuals knowledgeable in areas such as banking, monetary economics, agricultural economics, and environmental economics. The presence of economists can contribute not only to the improvement of health economics and the standard of living but also to the enhancement of defence forces.

This study aimed to shed light on the reasons behind students' negative perceptions of economics and the factors responsible for this attitude. By promoting the role of economics, we can transform the socio-economic landscape of Somalia. Economics can serve as a tool to tackle poverty, droughts, inequality, unemployment, discrimination, and other challenges that societies commonly face.

It is time for all individuals to take action and address the lack of public awareness regarding the importance of studying economics and the career



opportunities associated with it. The community as a whole plays a crucial role in solving this issue. Universities, the private sector, and the public sector can collaborate to address the problem of negative perceptions through job offerings, consultancy services, public awareness campaigns, and engaging in debates and discussions related to the field of study.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher offers the following recommendations. To enhance public awareness and promote understanding of the significance of economics as a discipline and its associated career prospects, EAU Garowe Campus should implement public awareness campaigns targeted at high schools, with a particular focus on Form 4 and Form 3 students. These campaigns can effectively introduce and familiarize students with the field of economics. Another effective approach to address this issue is to establish an open-day program that specifically focuses on economics, providing students with knowledge about the subject and the various career opportunities it offers. Through this program, students can gain a better understanding of the relevance and importance of studying economics. EAU Garowe Campus can also consider offering summer programs that aim to provide students with a comprehensive overview of economics. It is suggested that these public awareness initiatives and programs be led by economics lecturers, senior students, and university administration. The campaigns should place a strong emphasis on economics, encouraging students to actively engage with presenters and ask questions pertinent to the field. Additionally, it is important for the university to collaborate with individuals possessing marketing and communication skills to ensure the success of these initiatives.

To enhance public awareness regarding the significance of the field and the career opportunities associated with the public sector, it is crucial to implement public awareness campaigns. Individuals studying economics can secure positions in governmental appointments at the local, state, and federal levels, as well as across all levels of the public sector. Working as a government economist offers greater job security since employment

decisions in the government are not reliant on market stability or profits. Economists play a vital role in the public sector, addressing various issues such as corruption, lack of accountability, and other challenges faced by our public institutions. To counter negative perceptions about economics, the government should proactively organize debates and discussions on topics like inflation, unemployment, poverty, and gross national product (GNP). Additionally, it should emphasize the ways economists can contribute to resolving these problems. The government can also arrange events for high school students where they can learn about the roles and responsibilities of economists and how they can make valuable contributions at different levels of the public sector. Furthermore, the government should provide job opportunities for graduate students. If first-year students observe that the majority of economics graduates find employment, it may create a positive attitude towards economics. By implementing these measures, progress can be made in eliminating this problem.

Finally, to enhance public awareness of the significance of this discipline and the associated career prospects, the private sector should implement measures to address this matter. Economists hold positions across various levels of private sectors, such as retail, financial services, construction, manufacturing, legal services, news media, hospitality, aviation, and transportation. Within the private sector, economists fulfil a wide range of responsibilities, utilizing their expertise to inform decision-making processes within businesses and financial institutions. One aspect of their work involves market analysis, wherein economists analyse market trends, consumer behaviour, and competitor actions to offer business insights into market dynamics, demand forecasts, and potential risks. They contribute to strategic planning processes by providing insights into long-term economic trends, industry dynamics, and global market developments, assisting businesses in identifying growth opportunities and gaining competitive advantages. Recognizing the significance of economists for the private sector, it is imperative for the private sector to launch public campaigns that highlight the importance of this field

of study and the career opportunities it presents. Providing employment opportunities for graduate students is particularly important for the private sector. These initiatives should specifically target high school students, offering discussions and debates about the roles and responsibilities of economists in the public sector, along with the available career prospects.

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